



What are the quick facts we need to know about sperm whales?

- **Type:** Sperm whales are mammals. Their babies are called calves.
- **Diet:** They are carnivores.
- **Size:** They vary in size, but generally measure 49 to 59 feet. During the heyday of whaling, whalers saw sperm whales up to 85 feet (or more).
- **Weight:** Adult sperm whales average between 35 - 45 tons.
- **Group Name:** Sperm whales live in pods. These pods consist mostly of females and their young.
- **Living Patterns:** Females, with their calves, mostly live in tropical or subtropical waters. Males can migrate to higher latitudes, traveling alone or in groups. Males travel back towards the equator during breeding season.
- **Travel Speed:** Sperm whales have very large tail flukes, averaging around 16 feet (5 meters) from tip to tip. This helps them to travel around 23 miles (37 km) per hour.
- **Favorite Food:** Evidence suggests that sperm whales really love giant squid.
- **Appetite:** To maintain their massive size, sperm whales eat about one ton (2,000 pounds) of fish and squid every day.
- **Distinctive Feature:** Sperm whales have massive heads which cover about one-third of their entire body length.
- **Brains:** Scientists believe that sperm whales have the largest brain of any creature known to have lived on the Earth.
- **Interesting Fact:** A sperm whale's head contains large quantities of oil, called "spermaceti." The oil in a sperm whale's head is found inside its "case."
- **Buoyancy:** A whale can change its spermaceti from fluid (when the whale is in warmer water near the surface) to a hard, waxy substance (when the whale is in colder water during deep dives). Scientists believe

this ability helps the whale to change its buoyancy (from deep diving to surface rising).

- **Deep Diving:** Sperm whales, who are looking for giant squid, can dive to a depth of one thousand meters (3,280 feet).
- **Holding Their Breath:** A sperm whale can hold its breath for a really long time. When they dive deep into the ocean, they can hold their breath for around ninety minutes.
- **Communication:** Sperm whales are vocal. They communicate with sounds, known to people as “clangs,” which may also help them with “echolocation.”
- **Echolocation:** Sounds of sperm whales travel underwater. Scientist believe these sounds are not just used for communication but for helping sperm whales to locate their prey.
- **Prey Location:** Sounds which travel underwater, like the “clangs” of sperm whales, travel until those sounds reach objects. When the sound reaches an object, it bounces back - just like an echo - to its sender. This helps the sperm whale to assess the size, shape and location of its potential prey.
- **Mocha Dick:** Before Herman Melville wrote his story about “Moby Dick” - a huge, white sperm whale who lived in the Pacific - 19th-century whalers reported seeing a massive albino sperm whale near [Mocha Island](#) (off the southern coast of Chile). According to Jeremiah N. Reynolds, an American writer, Mocha Dick was killed in 1838. He was reportedly 70 feet long, and his body yielded around 100 barrels of oil.

In this image, we see a white sperm whale. It could resemble “Mocha Dick” except that it does not have scars all over its head (from all the efforts whalers made to capture *that* leviathan).

Click on the image for a better view.

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